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**Panel on Transport and
Panel on Environmental Affairs**

**Minutes of joint meeting held on
Monday, 12 July 2010, at 10:45 am
in the Chamber of the Legislative Council Building**

Members present : Members of the Panel on Transport

- * Hon CHEUNG Hok-ming, GBS, JP (Chairman)
- * Hon Andrew CHENG Kar-foo (Deputy Chairman)
- * Ir Dr Hon Raymond HO Chung-tai, SBS, S.B.St.J., JP
Hon LAU Kong-wah, JP
- * Hon Miriam LAU Kin-ye, GBS, JP
Hon Abraham SHEK Lai-him, SBS, JP
Hon LI Fung-ying, BBS, JP
Hon Tommy CHEUNG Yu-yan, SBS, JP
Hon WONG Kwok-hing, MH
- * Hon LEE Wing-tat
- * Hon Jeffrey LAM Kin-fung, SBS, JP
Hon Ronny TONG Ka-wah, SC
- * Hon KAM Nai-wai, MH
Hon LEUNG Kwok-hung
- * Hon Albert CHAN Wai-yip

Members of the Panel on Environmental Affairs

Hon Audrey EU Yuet-mee, SC, JP (Chairman)
Hon James TO Kun-sun
Prof Hon Patrick LAU Sau-shing, SBS, JP
Hon Cyd HO Sau-lan
Hon CHAN Kin-por, JP

Hon Tanya CHAN

(* Also members of the Panel on Environmental Affairs)

Members absent : Members of the Panel on Transport

Hon WONG Sing-chi
Hon IP Wai-ming, MH
Hon Mrs Regina IP LAU Suk-ye, GBS, JP

Members of the Panel on Environmental Affairs

Hon CHAN Hak-kan (Deputy Chairman)
Hon WONG Yung-kan, SBS, JP

Public officers attending : Agenda item II

Miss Janet WONG
Principal Assistant Secretary for Transport and Housing

Ms Carolina YIP
Acting Commissioner for Transport

Miss Alice AU-YEUNG
Principal Transport Officer/Bus and Railway
Transport Department

Dr POON Kit
Under Secretary for the Environment

Mr Carlson CHAN
Deputy Director of Environmental Protection

Mr MOK Wai-chuen
Assistant Director of Environmental Protection
(Air Policy)

Mr Edmond HO
Principal Environmental Protection Officer
(Mobile Source)

Clerk in attendance: Ms Joanne MAK
Chief Council Secretary (1)2

Staff in attendance : Ms Sarah YUEN
Senior Council Secretary (1)6

Miss Pauline NG
Clerical Assistant (1)1

Action

I Election of Chairman

Ms Audrey EU was elected Chairman of the joint meeting.

II Rationalization of bus routes to improve air quality

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| (LC Paper No. CB(1)2454/09-10(01) | –Administration's paper on guidelines on franchised bus service rationalisation |
| LC Paper No. CB(1)2454/09-10(02) | –Administration's paper on pilot low emission zones for franchised buses |
| LC Paper No. CB(1)2455/09-10 | –Minutes of joint meeting on 28 May 2010 |
| LC Paper No. CB(1)2009/09-10(01) | –Administration's paper on results of consultation with District Councils on franchised bus route development programme for 2010-2011 |
| LC Paper No. CB(1)2009/09-10(02) | –Administration's paper on environmental benefits on expedited replacement of franchised buses |
| LC Paper No. CB(1)1449/09-10 | –Minutes of joint meeting on 22 January 2010 |
| LC Paper No. CB(1)2009/09-10(03) | –Administration's |

LC Paper No. CB(1)916/09-10(01) –Administration's paper on rationalization of bus routes to improve air quality)

consultation papers for District Councils on the 2010-2011 Bus Route Development Programme

Franchised bus service rationalization

2. The Acting Commissioner for Transport (C for T) briefed members on the factors that the Administration would consider when implementing the planning guidelines on franchised bus service rationalization (the Guidelines). The Chairman invited members to give comments on the Guidelines to help improve them to facilitate bus service rationalization.

General comments

3. Mr Andrew CHENG stressed the importance of the four factors which he had highlighted at the last joint meeting held to discuss bus service rationalization, namely, designation of bus-bus interchange (BBI) stations; offer of section fares, as well as monthly and weekly tickets; the need to give due regard to the implications of bus service rationalization (e.g. impacts on areas populated by elderly persons); and the need to ensure environmental benefits. Referring to paragraph 7(iii) of the Administration's paper on guidelines on franchised bus service rationalization (LC Paper No. CB(1)2454/09-10(01)), Mr CHENG considered it insufficient to only request bus operators to consider provision of interchange discounts wherever appropriate and feasible for affected passengers. He considered that the operators might simply refuse to offer the discounts by claiming such was infeasible. He expressed concern that little progress in bus service rationalization could be made if interchange discounts were not readily made available.

4. C for T responded that the total journey fare as compared with the fare of the existing service would be a factor for consideration when examining bus service rationalization. Unlike cases where residents would only be slightly affected as in the amalgamation of Route 6 and Route 6A, provision of fare concessions would be ensured as far as practicable if residents were seriously affected, and the relevant District Councils (DCs)

would also be thoroughly consulted. As to the designation of BBI stations, the principle had already been incorporated in paragraph 7(iv) of LC Paper No. CB(1)2454/09-10(01). The need to note whether the areas concerned were populated by elderly persons, the offer of section fares, and the need to ensure environmental benefits had also been highlighted in paragraphs 7(i), 7(iii) and 7(vi) respectively. The Chairman, however, opined that the Administration failed to adequately explain the above factors in greater detail in the quoted paragraphs.

5. Mr LEE Wing-tat suggested that the above planning principles in pursuing franchised bus service rationalization should be applied to bus rationalization proposals presently under contemplation to test the principles' practicability. Mr Albert CHAN considered that the Guidelines should also highlight the need to minimize the impacts of bus service rationalization on the travelling time, and mandate that no additional cost would arise from the need to interchange. If not, bus service rationalization would in his view only help bus companies save cost by cancelling under-utilized routes, and increase their profits by requiring passengers to interchange.

The need to make proper interchange arrangements

6. Mr LAU Kong-wah highlighted the need to secure support for bus rationalization proposals by compensating affected passengers with interchange discounts or replacement services, and enquired whether the Administration would adopt this as a policy. C for T responded that detailed consultation would be conducted on bus service rationalization proposals and, where passengers were greatly affected, the provision of interchange discounts or replacement public light bus (PLB) service would be explored. In response to Mr LAU's request for further details, C for T quoted as an example the proposed truncation of Route 208, as a result of which the fare was reduced from \$7.0 to \$4.2. The Chairman opined that need to request bus operators to consider the provision of fare concessions to provide attraction to the affected passengers should be incorporated in the Guidelines.

7. While supporting the policy of using railways as the backbone of the transport system, Mr LAU Kong-wah considered it undesirable that in certain cases no or little discount was available for interchange between rail and PLB/bus service to facilitate bus service rationalization. In response to his call to urge MTR Corporation Limited (MTRCL) to offer greater interchange discounts to encourage more people to use rail service, C for T

confirmed that the Administration had already been pursuing the above and as a result fare discounts were available for many feeder bus/PLB routes. The Administration would continue such efforts. Highlighting the benefits which rail service could bring to the community as a whole and to the environment, Mr LAU called for greater efforts in this regard.

8. Mr KAM Nai-wai also considered that the provision of interchange discounts was important in facilitating the implementation of the rationalization proposals. In this regard, he suggested that instead of arbitrarily deciding on the interchange discounts, the extra waiting and travelling time incurred to the affected passengers as a result of interchanges involved should be used to work out the interchange discounts. In response, C for T agreed to consider the suggestion and pointed out that similar considerations were mentioned in paragraph 7(ii) of LC Paper No. CB(1)2454/09-10(01). She further pointed out that details on the additional time incurred were in fact already provided to the relevant DCs when submitting for their consideration bus service rationalization proposals.

9. Mr WONG Kwok-hing noted that interchange facilities for Tuen Mun Road would not be available until completion of its improvement works a few years later. He expressed concern that this might affect the progress in implementing BBI schemes long awaited by residents of Northwest New Territories (NWNT), who would willingly interchange to other routes/modes of transport if interchange discounts were available. C for T responded that BBI schemes would be made available for residents of Tuen Mun and NWNT as necessary pending provision of the said interchange facilities. The Chairman urged the Administration to improve the Guidelines by highlighting the need to provide proper interchange facilities. Mr WONG added that MTRCL should be requested to provide free shuttle bus service between Tung Chung Station and Yat Tung Estate as the residents of which were mostly poor.

10. Ms Miriam LAU called for better co-ordination among relevant Government departments to identify land for providing more BBI stations to facilitate interchange, preferably with interchange discounts. C for T responded that interchange stations would be provided where land was available. The Chairman opined that the provision of an interchange station in every district should be ensured as far as practicable through more comprehensive planning.

The need to maintain service quality in pursuing bus rationalization

11. In response to Miss Tanya CHAN on the meaning of the expression of "socially essential" in item III "Frequency Reduction" of the Guidelines, C for T explained that socially essential routes were routes serving remote areas such as rural areas and villages, without which the residents concerned would have no alternatives. In response to Miss CHAN on whether there were such routes in the urban areas, C for T explained that whether a route was socially essential hinged on the transport services available in the areas concerned and not whether the areas were rural or urban.

12. Mr WONG Kwok-hing considered that paragraphs 7(i), (ii) and (v) of LC Paper No. CB(1)2454/09-10(01) seemed to suggest that bus services for remote new towns would likely be cancelled or reduced, and that buses without air-conditioning would be used to serve these areas. C for T responded that regard would be duly given to residents' needs. She further explained that there were plans to phase out non air-conditioning buses by 2012 and that use of buses without air-conditioning was sometimes requested by residents. The Chairman urged the Administration to improve the Guidelines by clearly specifying therein the need to retain socially essential routes such as those serving remote areas or where the majority of the passengers were the elderly.

13. Ms LI Fung-ying considered it regrettable that the Guidelines had only provided a general framework but not specific consideration criteria. In particular, the Guidelines had failed to highlight the need to safeguard local interests by ensuring that proper bus service with reasonable frequency would be provided for remote areas or where the majority of the passengers were the elderly, and that in return for service rationalization, interchange discounts and replacement services would be made available to provide choice and keep fares affordable. She urged the Administration to seriously consider including in the Guidelines the need to ensure that bus service frequency would not exceed 20-30 minutes as a result of service rationalization, and that interchange discounts should be ensured.

14. C for T invited members to note item III "Frequency Reduction" of the Guidelines, which specified that reduction in bus deployment for socially essential routes and routes with peak headways at 15 minutes or more would be considered on individual merits. Notwithstanding, the

Administration would improve the Guidelines by further clarifying this principle as well as those highlighted in paragraph 7 of LC Paper No. CB(1)2454/09-10(01), which in fact had incorporated members' views expressed at the two joint meetings previously held. The Administration would elaborate the consideration of socially essential routes, which should refer to bus routes serving remote areas or where the majority of the passengers were the elderly.

15. In response to Ms LI Fung-ying's concern, C for T said that item IV "Route Cancellation/Amalgamation" was a general guideline and in the case where remote areas were not served by other transport modes, service rationalization proposals would be considered based on individual merits.

16. Highlighting the need to maintain service quality while rationalizing bus service, Ms Miriam LAU expressed concern about item III "Frequency Reduction" of the Guidelines, which specified that the Transport Department (TD) would consider reducing bus deployment if the average occupancy rate of an individual route was below 85% during the peakiest half-hour of the peak period, or below 30% during the off-peak period. Pointing out that affected passengers would complain if the waiting time was too long, Ms LAU proposed that vehicles with smaller carrying capacities such as green minibus (GMB) should be used to provide service in place of under-utilized bus routes to keep service frequency reasonable. C for T responded that this was already the existing approach, and GMB routes providing feeder service to bus termini or MTR stations were introduced as necessary in place of rationalized bus routes.

17. Noting that according to item III "Frequency Reduction" of the Guidelines where stated frequency of railway feeder routes might not be reduced despite low occupancy rate, Ms Miriam LAU pointed out that the approach was tilted in favour of rail service. To obviate the above criticism, Ms LAU opined that direct point-to-point bus routes to commercial districts that did not operate via busy corridors should always be allowed to operate.

How objections to rationalization proposals could be handled

18. Mr Ronny TONG pointed out that in pursuing bus service rationalization, in order to minimize conflicts, there was a need to ensure

that alternative services would be made available to prevent affected passengers from being inconvenienced or made to bear heavier transport expenses. Pointing out that DCs in general opposed bus service rationalization proposals because residents concerned would inevitably be affected, Mr TONG highlighted the need to spell out objective criteria on which a bus service rationalization proposal was based, so that when the utilization rate of a certain bus route fell below the set percentage, cancellation of the route concerned could be readily justified. Mr TONG further opined that the availability of replacement services should be clearly made a criterion for assessing the proposals, so that whether a bus route should be rationalized would be determined according to objective and consistent criteria.

19. Ms Miriam LAU, Mr LEE Wing-tat and the Chairman agreed on the need for cross-party co-operation in LegCo in pursuing bus service rationalization. Mr CHAN Kin-por questioned what could be done to compel DCs to adhere to the Guidelines as these Guidelines were not binding on DCs. C for T responded that bus service rationalization decisions were in fact made by TD. However, TD was still prepared to conduct detailed negotiation with stakeholders on rationalization proposals, and provision of details on the relevant justifications, implications and remedial measures would be ensured to facilitate reaching a consensus. For example, the negotiation for the bus service rationalization regarding Route 70 took three to four years, and scores of meetings had been held to discuss it before TD decided to cancel the route.

Refining the Guidelines

20. The Chairman called upon the Administration to refine the Guidelines. She considered that major principles such as benefits to the environment and to service quality, provision of interchange discounts, etc. should be elaborated. Efforts should be made in planning the provision of interchange facilities and replacement MTR and PLB services. In addition, apart from stating the circumstances under which bus service would be increased/reduced, flexibility to give due regard to special conditions that warranted exemption from bus service rationalization should also be provided. In the Chairman's view, if a consensus on the Guidelines could be achieved in LegCo, the Guidelines might help DCs discuss the rationalization proposals in a more objective manner and facilitate their implementation. She therefore called upon members to consult and seek endorsement from their respective parties of the Guidelines when its refined version was available. In response to the Chairman, C for T agreed to

provide the refined Guidelines in September 2010 for comments. Members also agreed that whether a further joint meeting would be held to discuss the refined Guidelines would be determined after circulation of the refined Guidelines.

(Post-meeting note: The refined Guidelines were issued vide LC Paper No. CB(1)2816/09-10 on 7 September 2010.)

The bus replacement programme and other options to reduce emissions from buses

21. At the Chairman's invitation, the Under Secretary for the Environment (USEN) reported on the progress of the Administration's study to examine the feasibility of introducing pilot low emission zones (LEZs) that aimed to restrict access for franchised buses to more environment-friendly models, and briefed members on possible alternatives to reduce emissions from the franchised bus fleet and facilitate the introduction of the proposed pilot LEZs.

Bus replacement

22. In response to Mr CHAN Kin-por, C for T confirmed that all the franchised buses running on Yee Wo Street, 92% on Hennessy Road, 93% on Nathan Road, 84% on Queensway, and 89% on Des Voeux Road Central were already Euro II or above bus models.

23. Noting that franchised bus companies were required to operate their franchised bus services with buses under the age of 18, Mr CHAN Kin-por enquired whether this was the international standard, and whether the age could be lowered to 15 to meet higher environmental standards. In this regard, the Chairman commented that international standards might not be a meaningful reference considering the unique characteristics of both local bus service and Hong Kong, namely, that Hong Kong was hilly and hot, and that the frequency and duty cycles of local bus service were more demanding than those overseas.

24. C for T responded that there was no international standard regarding bus retirement age. As such, the local practice was that, as long as a bus could pass the annual examination to ensure its safety and roadworthiness, it would be allowed to operate on the road until it reached the age of 18. Since this arrangement had taken account of the maintenance, operational and financial capability of the bus operators and their obligations to provide a proper and efficient service to the public, lowering of the bus retirement

age would have impacts on bus fare and operation of bus companies and therefore should be examined with care.

25. Mr KAM Nai-wai urged the Administration to extend the franchise period of bus companies to encourage them to make greater investment to replace their bus fleets more expeditiously. C for T responded that since the normal practice was for the franchise to roll forward, fuel cost and competition with rail and other services instead of the length of the franchise period were the major considerations when bus companies decided whether to invest more.

Other options to reduce emissions from buses

26. Mr KAM Nai-wai noted that the proposed pilot LEZs might not be introduced in the near future because, even if all the existing Euro IV or above buses were deployed to routes running through the busy corridors, there would still be a shortfall of about 2 200 buses. In response to him on the shortfall if Euro III or above buses were deployed instead, USEN and C for T confirmed that the shortfall would be decreased to a thousand plus buses. USEN, however, pointed out that since most buses on the roads could already comply with Euro II or better emission standards, to bring about more significant improvement to the environment, it might be more desirable to restrict entry to the pilot LEZs to franchised buses of emission standards at Euro IV or better.

27. Mr CHAN Kin-por was glad to note the Administration's plan to require franchised bus companies to retrofit their buses with the Selective Catalytic Reduction (SCR) device if found feasible. In response to him on the timetable concerned, USEN elaborated that the Administration would within 2010 form a task force comprising representatives from the major franchised bus companies, overseas and local experts as well as relevant Government departments to examine the related technical issues and to oversee the launching of a trial starting from 2011, which would hopefully be completed within six to 12 months.

Bus replacement vis-à-vis other options

28. Mr KAM Nai-wai pointed out that Members belonging to the Democratic Party were supportive of the use of public money to help accelerate the bus replacement programme to improve roadside air quality. It was therefore disappointing to note that the Administration had been slow in taking forward the bus replacement programme, and it only proposed the retrofitting of suitable after-treatment device. According to some bus companies, the retrofitting of such device was infeasible because it might

reduce the seating capacity of a bus and hence the bus companies' fare income. Moreover, instead of taking forward SCR retrofitting in full swing, the Administration was only commissioning a task force to conduct a trial on it.

29. USEN and the Assistant Director of Environmental Protection responded that SCR was a relatively new technology, the provision of which in new vehicles had only begun three to four years before, and SCR retrofitting had an even shorter history. Moreover, buses used in Hong Kong were mostly double-decker and heavily used, while those overseas were mainly single-decker and less heavily used. As such, it was considered prudent to conduct a trial to ascertain the feasibility and emission benefits of retrofitting SCR devices to the local Euro II and III franchised buses. Noting the above differences between local and overseas buses, Ms Cyd HO cast doubt on the emission benefits of SCR retrofitting.

30. The Chairman said that Members belonging to the Civic Party had also been urging the Administration to subsidize the bus replacement programme to accelerate it without impacting on bus fare level. She therefore expressed concern that the bus replacement programme would be delayed by the Administration's plan to conduct a trial on the SCR device notwithstanding its claim that the SCR retrofit could upgrade the emission performance of the retrofitted Euro II and III buses to reach Euro IV or above level. Moreover, as reported above, the trial would take at least a year, and that according to bus companies the SCR option might not be feasible. She therefore sought details on whether the progress of the trial could be expedited, the perceived difficulties, and the way forward if SCR retrofitting was found not feasible.

31. USEN agreed with the Chairman on the need to conduct the SCR trial as soon as practicable. However, although some places in Europe had successfully retrofitted some of their Euro II and Euro III buses with SCR devices that could reduce their nitrogen oxides emissions by about 60%, there remained a need to persuade bus companies to consider SCR retrofitting because the move would implicate on bus operation. Time was therefore required to prepare and conduct the trial with care to ensure the results were representative. Nevertheless, the Administration would endeavour to have the initial trial results ready by end 2011. If the results were unsatisfactory, the Administration would explore other options. However, the SCR device's satisfactory performance overseas suggested that the SCR retrofit was a promising option to reduce the emissions of local

buses.

32. Ms Cyd HO considered the above timetable undesirable, pointing out that under the circumstances, very little time would be left for LegCo Members to secure funding to pursue the alternative of accelerating the bus replacement programme if necessary. This was because the current term of LegCo would only last until end June 2012. If the LegCo Members who had been pursuing bus replacement during the current term were not returned to LegCo in the following term, there would be no guarantee that the Administration would accelerate bus replacement. She therefore proposed that the SCR trial should be accelerated by conducting it along the busy corridors in Causeway Bay, Central and Mong Kok only, so that the results might be ready before mid June 2011 for the necessary funding to be made available in the 2011-2012 budget.

33. In response, USEN agreed to convey to the SCR task force Ms Cyd HO's views, as well as the Administration's stance that the SCR trial should be expedited as long as trial validity would not be compromised. Ms HO opined that if the Environment Bureau had sufficient determination, it should be able to expedite the trial.

The way forward

34. Summing up, the Chairman urged the Administration to actively consider the views and comments made by members at this meeting. She also said that the issues of LEZs and SCR retrofitting should be further followed up by the Subcommittee on Improving Air Quality under the Panel on Environmental Affairs.

III Any other business

35. There being no other business, the meeting ended at 12:40 pm.